



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
3170 EAST MAIN STREET
CANON CITY, COLORADO 81212



FRONT RANGE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
HIGH COUNTRY BANK
SALIDA, CO
July 7, 2004

MINUTES

Group 1

**Virginia Patton
Robert Shoemaker
Charles Rech
Rick Thompson**

Group 2

**Josh Osterhoudt
Larry Strohl**

Group 3

**Keith McNew
Joseph Duda
Loren Whittemore
Clarke Becker**

RAC Members not in attendance: Gene King, Frances Mathews, Kaaren Hardy, and Michael Bush. Leslie Wildesen is moving to Oregon and has resigned from the RAC.

GUESTS: Dennis Crowther, Landowner; Ellen Cesarone, Rep. Joel Hefley's Office, SeEtta Moss, Arkansas Valley Audubon Society; Andy Merritt, State Director Senator Allard's Office.

BLM/FS PERSONNEL: Roy Masinton, Ken Smith, Jim Rhett, Charles Medina

There was not adequate attendance for a quorum.

COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Roy read a letter from Leslie Wildesen regarding her resignation from the RAC as she is moving to Oregon. The letter expressed her appreciation and enjoyment of working with the group, and her hope that she could do some similar work in Oregon after she is relocated.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Dennis Crowther from the San Luis Valley, talked about the state of the Simpson and McIntyre Ranch properties managed by BLM. His concern is that the property has not been grazed and may be a wildfire hazard. He commented that adjacent properties have been grazed and are in good shape. Other concerns are weed control and mosquito/pest control. Crowther said he would be interested in grazing the property and also is involved with the Boy Scouts, who could possibly do a service project at the site. Jim Rhett responded that there is a problem getting funding to do the planning for the area. Rhette said BLM has started an interim plan for grazing and they have treated weeds on the property. He also commented that planning for the area will include public involvement.

Other issues involve species habitat concerns, such as the Southwest Willow Flycatcher. Prime grazing season is also prime birding season so that is a conflict. Several RAC members have toured the area at a previous meeting. Whittemore asked that the item be addressed at a future RAC meeting. It was expected this would be at the November 3, 2004 meeting and Mr. Crowther was encouraged to attend.

End of Public Comments

MANAGERS UPDATE:

Roy Masinton, Royal Gorge Field Manager: Several changes have occurred with the management team at the Royal Gorge Field Office. John Carrochi has gone to the State Office and will be working in Fire Management. Linda McGlothlen has been temporarily promoted to Associate Field Manager.

South Park Plan Amendment: Public scoping meetings have been held and comments were received from 40 individuals and organizations. BLM specialists have identified several issues and over this summer, BLM employees will be verifying the information that was received from the public. An Environmental Assessment will be written in the fall with an opportunity for public review next winter.

Wolf Springs Exchange: This exchange is near closing after many years of work. The acquisition will consolidate public land ownership and provide more opportunities to manage the natural resource values present on surrounding public land.

Gold Belt Travel Management Plan: One appeal has been received so far which was very short and seemed to lack specifics of how the appellant was harmed by the decision. The Protest and Appeal periods will close July 14, 2004.

Masinton gave information regarding community assistance grants that have been dispersed to many counties to assist in fire protection and planning. He also discussed Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) payments that have also been made to counties from the Department of the Interior. For the third year these have been paid early to assist with county budget planning.

Jim Rhett, Associate San Luis Valley Center Manager/Acting Rio Grande Forest Supervisor Jim Rhett stood in for Mark Sweeney to update the RAC on the San Luis Valley Travel Management Plan because Mark is in Alaska fighting fire. The initial scoping phase is complete and public scoping meetings had mixed attendance. The scoping meetings did produce some excellent comments which were very diverse. They are now in the process of organizing these comments, which will be shared with the public and addressed in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The draft EA is the next phase of the process. Service First changes in the valley have moved to the next level, with Pete Clark, Rio Grande Forest Supervisor also delegated as BLM Center Manager and Jim Rhett, Associate BLM Center Manager also delegated as Deputy Forest Supervisor.

Tom Goodwin, Saguache Field Manager/District Ranger: Fire restrictions lasted about a week until the rains started, now it is beginning to dry out again. Goodwin thanked the RAC members for their work on the Healthy Forest Resolution. (FRRAC 04-02). He said that a section consultation on timber issues will be done with the Fish and Wildlife Service and that they have a big task coming up with insect disease control. He believes that this resolution will be very beneficial as the agency moves forward to implement the Healthy Forest Initiative. Regarding the draft “Elk” Resolution, a meeting may be scheduled for early August involving several interested agencies

Goodwin reported that grazing this year may be a shortened season as the vegetation volume is not as much as he had hoped. Permittees may need to pull livestock off lands early unless there is more rain.

Charlie Medina, Salida District Ranger: The Salida Ranger District is working on the Resource Allotment Management Plan and grazing permittees. Surveys will be done this summer and he hopes to get through NEPA in a timely manner.

Medina gave an update on the North Fork Reservoir expansion project. This project would raise the water level since the Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District has rights to add 500 acre feet of storage at the reservoir. An EA will be done for potential impacts, including any that may occur to the campground. Salida and Poncha Springs own the water. He said that two other dams will also be re-permitted. Work is being done on a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Natural Resources regarding administering flows.

DRAFT RESOLUTION ON ELK HERD IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY:

Larry Strohl facilitated a discussion on the “Elk” Resolution that was initiated at the May meeting. Based on guidance from the Council at that meeting, Strohl, Rick Thompson and Michael Bush drafted a resolution and Strohl asked the Council for their comments. Masinton asked that the limitations of the BLM be recognized, not to exceed BLM's responsibility to manage the habitat only, and not get into the management of wildlife.

The section on Buffalo was discussed, and it was said that the National Park Service is going back and forth on whether they want them. Keith McNew motioned to approve the resolution as written and Bob Shoemaker seconded that motion. In further discussion, Joe Duda commented that typically something like this would call for some kind of action in the Resolution, not just a statement of awareness. Duda suggested they strike the paragraph on bison as the RAC may not want to take a position on that and he moved to amend the resolution and Virginia seconded. No opposed votes were made and the resolution passed those that were in attendance. Whittemore asked that the Resolution be sent to members not in attendance for their comments

Informational Item: Duda addressed the RAC regarding an informational item on Colorado Forest Products and Colorado Proud. He said a logo has been developed for retailers who deal with local timber products and there will be an advertising push to increase public awareness. He said they are looking to assist businesses in starting up

and to help offset or mitigate costs so their money can go further. Colorado imports 95% of their wood products. Duda believes that 50 or so businesses will be able to use the logo. He hopes this will encourage suppliers to carry Colorado products and cut the costs of management per acre.

LUNCH

SAN LUIS VALLEY TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE: Since Mark Swinney is Alaska working on a fire, no presentation was made.

ARKANSAS HEADWATERS RECREATION AREA:

Rob White, State Parks Manager and John Nahomenuk, BLM River Manager were introduced to the RAC and presented information on many issues facing the Park.

Browns Canyon Wilderness Study Area: A brief history and description of the Wilderness Study Area was given. John Nahomenuk said that Congressman Hefley has been interested in introducing legislation to designate this as a wilderness area. Nahomenuk said several different proposals have been brought forward from the public, with some proposing a large amount of additional land beyond what is in the current WSA. The raft trip tomorrow will pass through these lands and provide an opportunity for further discussions. Ellen Cesarone added that the current bill, overview, map and report can be viewed at www.house.gov/hefley .

History Of Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) and the partnership:

The Arkansas River Recreation Management Plan was developed by a 22 member committee in the late 1980s and the AHRA was created in 1990. Nahomenuk advised the RAC that they could review the Management Plan on the website www.parks.state.co.us under Publications. In 2000 the Plan was reviewed and revised. With that revision the Colorado Division of Wildlife and U.S. Forest Service were recognized as additional partners in management. White commented that the partnership continues to work well.

Water and the Flow Program: White gave a brief summary of the Arkansas River Flow Program which attempts to maintain 700 cubic feet per second of flow at the Wellsville gauge until August 15th. This year a proposal has been made by the Arkansas River Outfitters Association to lower the level maintained to 600 cfs in an attempt to make water last longer. Outfitting on the Arkansas is a multi million dollar industry, as it remains the most rafted river in the Country. Also discussed were the benefits of adequate flows to the fishery - the Brown Trout fishery is incredible on the Arkansas River. A water flow website has been designed so the public can see current flow information and augmentation figures. The next phase will be to integrate information from other agencies which call for releases from reservoirs which affect the flow on the Arkansas.

Personnel:

Nahomenuk informed the RAC that he was just hired in June as the River Manager at AHRA, replacing Dave Taliaferro who retired. The Recreation Planner position which he

formerly occupied has been eliminated, which impedes BLMs commitment to the uplands areas. One experienced seasonal employee is basically holding this program together at the moment. Staff in Canon City has taken on some of his Recreation Planning duties as well. White then talked about State Parks personnel, saying there are currently two positions open in the park and it is common for one or the other agency to have vacancies.

Management Issues/Integrated Concept Plan (ICP), Survey, Reduction Of Outfitters:

Nahomenuk gave information on the ICP, with White providing the history of the proposal. The proposal includes a change of boat per day capacities for commercial and private boaters in different sections of the Arkansas River in an attempt to avoid a permit system for private boaters who have hit boats per day capacities in Browns Canyon. Also included in the ICP are changes to outfitter permit special use fees. The EA for the ICP was passed out with information on the ten points of the ICP. It is hoped with these changes and through education that a private boater permit system can be avoided.

White then addressed the efforts made to reduce the number of outfitters on the river. He stated that a balance must be found to keep business competitive and not overrun the river. Also discussed was the current moratorium on walk and wade fishing outfitters. Nahomenuk said the EA has been signed by Roy Masinton and is out for a 30 day appeal period. He informed the RAC of a survey currently underway with cooperation from the Washington office to collect input from anglers and boaters. This is being distributed by volunteers within the upper river corridor this year and the lower corridor next year.

Construction Projects:

Construction projects were discussed, including the Collegiate Peaks Scenic Overlook improvements which should commence after Labor Day. Funds for Railroad Bridge site improvements including work on the boat ramp have been approved

Several of the issues discussed are planned for further “on site” discussion on the raft trip through Browns Canyon tomorrow. Details were then given about what to bring, what to wear and where to meet.

The meeting was then adjourned at 4 p.m..

Roy L. Masinton
Front Range Center Manager
Bureau of Land Management

Loren R. Whittemore
Chairman
Front Range Resource Advisory Council